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WEATHER >>	Sunday, February 22, 2004 12:00AM EST					advertisement
STOCKS >>	Who should draw the lines?					
TRAFFIC >>	Would independent panel do better?					
OBITUARIES >>	By LYNN BONNER, Staff Writer					
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Dwindling breed

Volunteer firefighters give way to paid ones as small towns turn to suburbs.

Haiti's leader OKs plan

But armed rebels and political opponents don't like the U.S.-backed power-sharing proposal.

Edwards makes bold jobs pledge

John Edwards and John Kerry would both chart a course on U.S. trade policy that differs from President Bush's.

Cooper rebuked in Gell case

AG handled retrial badly, law profs say.

Powwow aims to lure brains

Six middle-schoolers huddled together on the top bleacher in the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics gym, nudging and teasing each other the way teens often do.

Drivers may see more green

Raleigh intends to update its traffic signals to reduce congestion and time spent at red lights.

Four die in collision

Girl, 12, loses parents, sisters.

He wins friends and influences land deals

Sig Hutchinson stands behind the podium, speaking softly to the group before him.

Heels hold off Noles

UNC returns to .500 in ACC as FSU comeback

Drawing new legislative districts is supposed to be a quick, once-a-decade exercise. But in North Carolina, redistricting is a marathon that drags on for years.

Once again, primaries related

have been delayed because the state does not have federal permission to use the House and Senate districts that state lawmakers drew in

November. In 2002, the primaries were pushed from May to September when a lawsuit by a group of Republicans against maps drawn by the Democratic-controlled legislature forced lines to be drawn three times -- the third time by a Superior Court judge.

Borderwars

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The latest shaking of the election calendar is renewing calls for an independent redistricting commission. Republican gubernatorial candidates Dan Barrett and George Little and GOP lieutenant governor candidate Jim Snyder are joining groups such as Common Cause North Carolina, the N.C. Center for Voter Education and the John Locke Foundation in calling for such a commission.

"The legislature shouldn't be able to pick their own voters," said Don Carrington of the John Locke Foundation. "Even if Republicans get in charge, you're still going to have the same problem. To separate the process from incumbency and party affiliation would be much better."

Little said legislators' time would be better spent on other matters.

"It's getting to the point that they can't do what they need to do in the legislature," he said. "The legislature is worried about the next election. The redistricting commission is not going to be worried about the next election."

But bills for an independent redistricting commission languish in the General Assembly.

Republican Sen. Ham Horton of Winston-Salem, who is sponsoring the proposal with Democratic Sen. Ellie Kinnaird of Carrboro, blames the cold shoulder on legislative Democrats trying to hold on to power as more and more North Carolinians vote Republican.



comes up short.

Succeeding quietly

You won't see these coaches on ESPN - they aren't flashy and they aren't in trouble. But they are having an impact on local athletes.

UCLA victim No. 23

No. 1 Stanford stays unbeaten.

Randolph shows 'drive' to succeed

Versatile Duke big man making strides.

Wolfpack faces Husky non-conference test

The offer was first extended in May, Washington coach Lorenzo Romar said, but also was open-ended. Fox Sports Net said it would line the Huskies up against an ACC team and put the game on national television, on its Sunday night package. The catch: the Fox people couldn't tell Romar whom the Huskies would play.

Canes, Francis tie it up

In a draw with the Bruins, Canes captain Ron Francis scores to tie for 20th in career goals.

Tire wear wears on Cup teams

The Rock chews up rubber at a rapid rate.

Fat refunds?

Fat chance, for most people. The bulk of the savings will go to a narrow slice of people, mainly the wealthy.

Many fail to claim valuable tax credit

Thousands of low-income taxpayers across North Carolina fail to claim a credit that can lower their tax bills or increase their refunds.

Jobless also must pay taxes

Few job seekers realize that unemployment benefits are taxable

"The Democrat Party, which has a majority in the Senate and effectively in the House, is going to do everything it can to hang on in spite of the fact that votes are running against them," he said.

Kinnaird said she hasn't seen any sign that a majority of legislators is willing to hand power over their political futures to an appointed commission.

"That's the \$64,000 question, isn't it?" she said. "The party in power doesn't want to give up power. That's understandable because we each believe in our own philosophy."

They propose a nine-member commission, with the Supreme Court chief justice, the Senate leader and the House speaker each appointing one Democrat and one Republican. The governor would have three appointments, with no more than two from the same party. The legislature would not vote on the plans, but the U.S. Justice Department or a panel of federal judges would have to review them for compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

Ten states make independent commissions responsible for redrawing legislative districts. Skeptics, however, question whether a commission would work in North Carolina.

If avoiding lawsuits is the goal, it's not clear that redistricting commissions are the way to go, said Sen. Dan Clodfelter, a Charlotte Democrat and chairman of the Senate Redistricting Committee. At a public hearing on redistricting last year, he quoted figures showing that independent commissions are sued at the same rate as legislatures over redistricting plans.

A commission isn't a perfect solution, but it would be an improvement, said Chris Heagarty, executive director of the N.C. Center for Voter Education.

"It would be better if months of the legislators' time were not spent on political questions when it could be spent on policy questions," he said. "It would be better if you didn't have political parties fighting legislative battles in the courts."

He compared the push for a redistricting commission to the campaign to give the governor veto power. After years of debate, legislators put the veto to a 1996 referendum -- and voters approved it overwhelmingly.

"We can't ignore the problem and hope it goes away," Heagarty said, "especially when it stays with you for 10 years."

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